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Crohn's Disease and Colitis

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Crohn's Disease and Colitis

Colitis and enteritis are general terms meaning inflammation of the large and small intestines. Modern medicine identifies various types of colitis including ulcerative colitis, mucus colitis or irritable bowel syndrome, Crohn's disease and other less common types.

Symptoms can include constipation, diarrhea, bleeding, tenderness, pain and at times fever and weight loss. In severe cases surgery may be recommended to remove damaged and scarred areas of the large or small intestines. Let us examine possible nutritional factors which may be associated with colitis.

Low Sodium/Potassium Ratio

One pattern related to colitis revealed on trace mineral analysis is a low sodium/potassium. This pattern indicates tissue break-down or protein catabolism. The intestinal lining is the fastest growing tissue in the body. If protein synthesis is impaired, regeneration of this tissue may be impaired as well. The result can be symptoms of colitis.

The causes for excessive tissue breakdown are many. Copper toxicity or a low zinc/copper ratio is a common cause. Zinc is required for the enzyme RNA transferase, an essential step in protein synthesis. Excessive copper can interfere with the metabolic activity of zinc.

Toxic metals, in particular cadmium, also interfere with zinc metabolism. Other toxic metals such as mercury, lead, arsenic and others may also cause bowel disturbance.

An inability to burn glucose in the cells can cause tissue catabolism. Without glucose as a source of energy, the body has no choice but to cannibalize its own tissues, breaking them down to supply energy. Lack of available glucose can be caused by an unbalanced diet, deficiencies of manganese, zinc or chromium, or some other problem in the energy pathway preventing glucose from reaching or being utilized within the cells.

Excessive chronic stress can cause tissue catabolism. Colitis patients tend to experience an aggravation of their symptoms when under stress. Many colitis patients are fast oxidizers. Their sympathetic nervous system is very active, causing them to expend excess energy which eventually causes tissue breakdown.

Imbalanced Calcium/Magnesium Ratio

Another common finding on trace mineral analyses of colitis patients is a very low, or very high calcium/magnesium ratio. This imbalance may be related to sugar intolerance, or to emotional difficulties that can contribute to colitis symptoms. In textbooks of psychosomatic medicine, symptoms of colitis are related to perfectionistic tendencies and sometimes to passive-aggressive behavior patterns.

Protein Deficiency

Because the intestine is a rapidly growing tissue, adequate amino acids are required for its constant regeneration. Low protein diets, or poor protein utilization can contribute to colitis. This might be indicated on a trace mineral analysis by a low, or very high phosphorus level, or an imbalanced zinc level or zinc/copper ratio. Sometimes the solution is as simple as eating more protein in the daily diet. Other times this is only part of the solution.

Improperly digested protein may give rise to toxic putrefactive substances that inflame and aggravate the bowel. A deficiency of hydrochloric acid in the stomach, stress, deficiency of liver and pancreatic enzymes and improper bowel flora can all impair protein digestion.

Supplements to aid protein digestion include hydrochloric acid and pepsin, liver and pancreas enzymes and black radish root, ox bile and pancreatin. Eating slowly and chewing thoroughly may also be helpful. Fiber can help absorb certain toxic substances from the gut. Fiber can also help promote beneficial intestinal bacteria. Some colitis patients may not tolerate too much roughage, or certain types of roughage. However, where possible it is beneficial.

Food Allergies

Some people with Crohn's disease and colitis improve dramatically when they are placed on a hypo-allergenic diet, or a diet of foods that they tolerate well. The change can be dramatic. Such a diet might exclude wheat, soy, egg, yeast and corn. It might include rice, vegetables, chicken and perhaps other foods the person can tolerate well. Allergy testing may be necessary to determine which foods would be best.

Impaired Intestinal Flora

Improper bowel flora can contribute to irritation of the intestines resulting in enteritis or colitis. There may be a deficiency of the proper intestinal flora such as lactobacillus acidophilus, bifidobacterium bifidum or other beneficial flora.

The problem may also be an overgrowth of improper flora, which may include certain strains of E.coli, or a strain of candida or another yeast.

Supplementary acidophilus, bifidus or live culture yogurt may be helpful for colitis symptoms. Supplements that kill yeast such as caprylic acid or grapefruit seed extract may also be helpful. Reducing fermented foods, sweets and fruit juices that promote yeast growth may also be helpful. At times, restricting all carbohydrate foods is helpful for the same reason.

Parasitic Infection

Some cases of colitis are caused by an infection with any of a number of intestinal parasites such as entamoeba histolitica, blastocystis hominis or others. A stool analysis may be necessary to detect intestinal parasites. Parasitic infections are more common than imagined. Much of our food is grown outside the United States where standards of cleanliness are low. Also, food may become infected during preparation or unclean handling. Water supplies occasionally are contaminated with parasitic organisms.

Intestinal Nutrients

Other nutrients that may be of help include soothing herbs such as aloe vera and slippery elm. L-glutamine, soluble fibers, butyrate, duodenal and salivary glandulars and fructooligo-saccharides also help rebuild the intestines.

Correcting mineral imbalances and renourishing the colon with proper diet and supplements may help many cases of colitis and Crohn's disease.

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